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NC POLICY WATCH

Stories & voices
that **matter.**

Pressure mounts on NC's largest pork producer to clean up its act

By [Lisa Sorg](#)

Frenches Creek Finishing lies in the watery lowlands of Bladen County, near Lion Swamp, Conkill and Briary bays, and a chain of canals that drain toward the Cape Fear River and the sea.

Owned by Murphy-Brown, the farm, which includes a nursery, can house more than 17,000 hogs, including the newly weaned and those ready for slaughter. It is also one of 11 industrialized swine farms named in a 2006 federal consent decree because their operations threaten the quality of the groundwater.

However, for nearly four years, Murphy-Brown has stonewalled an independent consultant's court-approved visits to the farms. As established by the consent decree, the visits were intended to further assess each site's conditions and waste lagoons to determine if an environmental clean up was necessary. The consultant, though, could enter the property only with Murphy-Brown's written permission.

Murphy-Brown has argued that the on-site inspections and potential clean up plans are premature — an objection US District Court Judge Malcolm Howard in this week's ruling, called “unfounded.”

Now the world's largest pork producer must allow the consultant, S&ME of Spartanburg, SC, to continue its long overdue work: gathering more data from the farms and if warranted, prescribing a “corrective action plan” that would specify methods of effecting a clean up.

“It's an important step forward,” said Geoff Gisler, an attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center. The SELC represented the plaintiffs, including the Waterkeeper Alliance, in the case. “The consultants need to go on site and determine what's there and how to fix it.”

Dale Mullen, an attorney with McGuireWoods representing Murphy-Brown, countered that S&ME based its conclusions on old and outdated information, adding, “media reports that pollution was found on the farms were just wrong.”

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